

History Research Center

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Part of the [Final Solution](#)—the genocide of Europe's Jews in the [Holocaust](#)—involved the establishment of ghettos in German-occupied territories in which Jews were confined until they could be dispatched to [concentration and extermination camps](#). The Warsaw Ghetto, within the city's old Jewish quarter, was enclosed first by barbed wire and later by a brick wall. By summer 1942, about half a million Jews were crowded into the 840 acres of the ghetto. Starvation, privation, and epidemic disease killed thousands monthly.

Starting on July 22, 1942, 5,000 Jews per day were transferred from the ghetto to the [Treblinka extermination camp](#). By September, only about 55,000 Jews remained in the Warsaw Ghetto. Realizing that their situation was desperate, those who remained decided to resist. They had no hope for a military victory, but decided that it was better to fight than to submit passively to extermination. The Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB) was formed and covertly took control of the ghetto. On January 9, 1943, [Schutzstaffel \(SS\)](#) head [Heinrich Himmler](#) ordered the deportation of 8,000 Jews. The order was met by resistance, as many refused to report as ordered, and ŻOB fighters began sniping at German troops. Under fire, the deportation proceedings were called off, and, greatly encouraged, ŻOB organized an even more widespread resistance effort, fortifying hideouts, scrounging weapons, and improvising explosives for the battle all knew was coming.

On April 19, 1943, about 3,000 German troops under SS Brigadier General Jürgen Stroop, including 2,600 SS troops as well as regular army soldiers and police, attacked the ghetto with tanks and other armored vehicles, as well as machine guns and artillery. Opposing them were some 600 ŻOB fighters and 400 from another group, the Jewish Military Union (ZZW). From well-prepared positions, the Jews fought with one machine gun, pistols, hand grenades, and Molotov cocktails. Stroop was shocked at the ferocity and organization of the resistance. He was obliged to fight in the ghetto streets daily, finally declaring the ghetto secure on May 16—even though resistance continued.

Polish Home Army and other Polish resistance fighters tried unsuccessfully to breach the ghetto's walls in the hope of providing an exit route for the Jews. Those Jewish fighters who were not killed in combat committed suicide or were captured; however, 50 ŻOB fighters escaped through the sewers. The uprising killed 14,000 Jews, many the victims of arson fires. Seven thousand survivors were murdered at Treblinka. Others were sent to the Majdanek camp, where they met the same fate. German casualties were not officially calculated, but probably included 400 killed and 1,000 wounded.

Further Information

Gutman, Israel. *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. New York: Mariner Books, 1998

Kurzman, Dan. *The Bravest Battle: The Twenty-Eight Days of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. New York: Da Capo, 1993.

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